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Problems with our Local Councilmember

October 6, 2017 at 1:40 AM

Good evening –

We have a situation that I believe needs to be shared with the Board of Directors. I apologize for this, but we are all accountable and Councilmember Salamanca is actively threatening not only to stop support and oppose any future projects/funding but he told Hope Burgess today that he actively seeking to rescind his approval of the \$90,000 he approved for Banana Kelly as part of the Stabilizing NYC program. I do not think our contract has been registered yet so this may be

the \$90,000 he approved for Banana Kelly as part of the Stabilizing NYC program. I do not think our contract has been registered yet, so this may be possible. This is the program where we organize tenants, like the tenants in 919 Prospect Avenue, who are being victimized by landlords who paid too much for their buildings (or are simply greedier than most) and are trying to actively harass tenants out of their (relatively) affordable apartments. And just like getting funding from one source often facilitates getting funding from other sources, sometimes the reverse is true as well. Losing funding from one source can have a cascading impact on other current and potential sources. This is especially true if the Councilmember is actively intervening with HPD and the Mayor's Office of Contracts to take something away or stop something coming to us. These kinds of interventions in the past have prompted Inspector General audits for all of our contracts with the city.

Background: As far as I know, Take Back the Bronx was planning an anti-gentrification rally and demonstration – Take Back the Hood. But they did not identify themselves on the flyers. In fact, this call to action had no named sponsors. I saw the flyer, but ignored it. It did not come up at meetings or as something we supported or advocated with our leadership. I should have paid more attention.

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At any rate, a couple of Fridays ago I was upstate and received a call from Councilmember Salamanca. He asked me if Banana Kelly was protesting him outside his office. I told him no. He told me that our organizers were out there so how can I say that we were not a part of it. He then complained that we were calling him a "Pimp" and said that he had to defend himself on Bronx 12. He sent me a copy of a placard of a photo of him, with the words "New Pimp on the Block" underneath. Standing next to the sign was our lead organizer Anna Burnham. She was not holding the sign and actually looked like she was lost in thought, as opposed to chanting. But he used that to say we were part of this.

Anna subsequently wrote an email to him, stating that she went to the rally because she was asked to by a group that is part of the Southern Boulevard coalition; that Banana Kelly had nothing to do with the messaging, and she did not approve or it. I believe her and believe in hindsight she should have not been there, but she was and sometimes we find ourselves in these kinds of situations.

Our Councilmember believed that I was avoiding him so he called Russell and Hope separately in for

him so he called Russell and Hope separately in for meetings. He told Russell that he would no longer support Banana Kelly and told Hope that he was looking to pull the \$90,000 allocated to us in the budget. He told her that he believes Anna's email to him was "disingenuous," that he "knows for a fact" that we helped organize this effort because, according to him, all of the flyers were printed out of our 1283 Westchester Avenue office, and basically told Hope that he is not going to "chase me down," that he is not going to allow Banana Kelly to use money that he approved for us to demonstrate against him, that we have never given him a chance to prove himself, and that I should know that he cannot work with Banana Kelly as long as Anna is here because we obviously have no accountability from our staff.

I think he is taking this further than is warranted, but I do understand how he can feel that we were actually a part of the messaging, especially since one of our organizers was carrying a sign with a photo of the Council Speaker, stating in words that she is a Real Estate Gusano, which translated means "maggot."

Concerned about all of this, but also that I thought he believed I was avoiding him, I did call him earlier (now yesterday). He was not told by his scheduler

he believed I was avoiding him, I did call him earlier (now yesterday). He was not told by his scheduler that the reason I had to cancel my meeting with him tomorrow is because my cousin passed away and the funeral is 10:30 On Friday on Long Island (our meeting was supposed to be at 10). I was pleased that he was not resistant to meeting and I think it makes sense for me to meet with him with our Board Chair, Theodora, when I have a new date. I think it is important that he know that we all accountable for our actions, including me.

As far as Anna is concerned, I am not in the habit of terminating employment when people make mistakes. I am when people do not learn from them, but we should never let anyone outside our organization dictate our staffing. Our organizers are young and will make mistakes. As I see it, the mistake they made here was being ignorant that their actions could actually hurt the very people they are being paid to help. The actions also may have broken one of the Cardinal rules of organizing – never get ahead of your own people. If our own people were not ready for this kind of confrontation – and we are far from being anything like ready for such a confrontation – then our organizers should not be involved either.

I am hopeful that the meeting with the Councilmember will be productive. Sorry to lay all

- He funded the summer camp to the tune of \$20,000 this year.
- He approved \$100,000 for Banana Kelly JOE NYC projects, which will be used for energy retrofits and solar.
- As mentioned above, he approved \$90,000 targeted for Banana Kelly as part of Stabilizing NYC.

We have to be independent but we also have to be smart and not let our egos get in the way of our mission. I see this as a learning experience, but we have a real problem that needs to be resolved at the same time.

I will keep you posted. In the meantime, Hope will be scheduling a meeting with our board, resident leadership, and organizing staff for when Anna comes back from (a well-deserved) vacation.

Again, sorry to lay all of this on you, it is out there and our Councilmember is not being shy about sharing his feelings about us with others.

Harry



...our own people were not ready for the kind of confrontation – and we are far from being anything like ready for such a confrontation – then our organizers should not be involved either.

I am hopeful that the meeting with the Councilmember will be productive. Sorry to lay all of this on you, but you have a right to know when our funding and our programs are threatened. Beyond the \$90,000 he is trying to take back:

- The Council Speaker can also hurt us. Indirectly, she can hurt us on any matter, but directly she can pull the rug out from under the CLT project we are doing in East Harlem with Picture the Homeless, where she is also a funder and the local Councilmember.
- We will need extensions on all of the HDFC real estate tax exemptions for the Core portfolio as part of the refinancing we are currently working on for those 447 units. If our Councilmembers does not approve of the HDFC exemption, the full Council will not.
- We will need the same kind of real estate exemption for the Podolsky portfolio, He can stop that as well.
- If we are successful in getting 919 away from Seth Miller, again we will need the same exemptions, which he can stop.
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